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# *Plato's enigmatic lecture 'On the Good'*

KONRAD GAISER

Aristotle, we learn from his pupil Aristoxenus, used to tell the story of a lecture by Plato "On the Good". Most members of the audience, according to the story, were thoroughly disappointed by the lecture because Plato treated the Good in terms of mathematics, which they did not understand. Recently, much has been thought and written about this lecture by Plato,<sup>1</sup> but Aristoxenus' account remains a puzzle. The time, place, form and content of Plato's lecture have been variously conjectured by the commentators. The real puzzle, however, lies in the fact that no-one can explain why Plato presented such difficult and demanding ideas to an obviously unsuitable and unprepared audience.

The passage, which comes in Aristoxenus' work on harmonics (*Elementa harmonica* II 30-31), may be translated as follows:

It is surely better to begin by stating the nature of the inquiry, and what it involves, so that with this foreknowledge we may proceed more easily on our chosen way, and recognize what stage we have reached and not unwittingly deceive ourselves about the matter.

As Aristotle was wont to narrate (δεῖ διηγείτο), this was what happened to the majority of the people who heard Plato's lecture *On the Good* (τὴν περὶ τἀγαθοῦ ἀρχόσων). Each came expecting to learn something about the things which are generally considered good for men, such as wealth, good health, physical strength, and altogether a kind of wonderful happiness. But when the mathematical demonstrations came, including numbers, geometrical figures and astronomy, and finally the statement, Good is One (καὶ τὸ πέραν οὗτ' ἀγαθὸν ἔστιν ἓν)<sup>2</sup> it all seemed to them, I imagine, utterly unexpected and strange; hence some belittled the matter, while others rejected it (οἱ μὲν ὑποκατεφρόνουν τοῦ πράγματος, οἱ δὲ κατεμέμφοιντο).

And what was the reason? They did not know what was coming but went along, like argumentative people (ἐριστικοί), at the mere word. But if someone begins with a summary of his lecture, then, I hold, everyone who came to listen is free either to give up<sup>3</sup>, or, if he likes, to stay, with the understanding he has already gained.<sup>4</sup>

Hence Aristotle himself, for these very reasons, as he said, used to give his prospective audience a summary of what he intended to say, and in what manner. Likewise it seems to me better, as I said at the beginning, to have foreknowledge.

I will also follow Aristotle's example by stating in advance the course I intend to take in my interpretation of the Aristoxenus passage. I wish to examine the following points:

1. The current state of research.
2. Later, dubious, descriptions of Plato's lecture.
3. Three comic fragments containing references to Plato's Good.
4. The content of the lecture (that is, the philosophical question).
5. The real riddle, namely the contradiction between the public lecture on the Good and repeated statements in Plato's written work that it is impossible to talk about this matter in a generally comprehensible manner.
6. Previous suggestions to account for the contradiction.
7. The problem of the dating and biographical context of Plato's public lecture.
8. My suggestion for a new way of preserving the existing evidence and solving the riddle.
9. Results and consequences of the investigation.

## 1.

Interpretation of Aristoxenus' story must be based on the observation that Plato's equation of Good with One on the one hand goes beyond all references to the Form of Good in the dialogues but on the other corresponds to what Plato's students wrote on the oral doctrine. Of especial importance here is Aristotle's treatise 'On the Good' (Περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. Several fragments of this work, which contained a summary of Plato's Agathon-doctrine, have been preserved.<sup>5</sup> As these show, Plato did not treat mathematics and the Good in the same way in his lecture as in dialogues like the Republic. Instead, he gave a straightforward demonstration of his theory of first principles, which remains implicit in the written works.

Just how paradoxical Aristoxenus' account remains, despite all attempts at interpretation, is well shown by a passage of W.K.C. Guthrie's monumental work "A History of Greek Philosophy", V (1978), 424-426:

This story from a contemporary or near-contemporary certainly leaves some questions unanswered . . . Why should Plato (especially in the light of what he said in the Seventh Letter) have taken it into his head to reveal to such an unworthy crowd the esoteric and highly technical mathematical basis of his philosophy of the Good as Limit and Unity? . . .

Now the later commentators offer a considerable amount of information about the content of what they call the unwritten lectures (or instruction) on the Good given by Plato and written down by Aristotle; so much in fact as to lend considerable support to the thesis that they embraced the main points of his Academic teaching, over a period of time, on the first principles of his ontology and axiology. *But can this be said about the unfortunate public lecture of Aristotle's story? Every-*

thing goes to show (to adopt a phrase of our Tübingen colleagues) that the entertaining tale related by Aristoxenus, if more than *bien trouvé*, refers to an incident unconnected with the regular Academic seminars in which Plato expounded, discussed and developed with his own pupils the mathematical and dialectical basis of his philosophy. Since Aristoxenus gives no hint of the motive for this venture into the light of publicity, which Aristotle considered a failure, we clearly cannot hope to recover it now. The little that can be said of the content of the lecture is repeated as Plato's elsewhere, so we lose nothing if we dismiss the story as a red herring. . . .

This is a clear formulation of the problem in hand. I do not wish to write off Aristoxenus' story as a red herring, but rather to attempt a better understanding of it: above all, a better understanding of the question which Guthrie assumes to be unanswerable from our position: why Plato publicly lectured on what could only be understood by pupils of the Academy. The attempt seems essential to me since lack of clarity at this point is liable to obstruct our correct appraisal of Plato's doctrine of the Good and of his theory of first principles.

For the last twenty years or so in Tübingen, research has been conducted with renewed energy into the oral doctrines of Plato not contained in his own writings. A controversy has developed, and the issue is still hotly contested by the two sides. The dispute centres on the significance attributed to Plato's oral doctrines in his philosophy as a whole. There can be no doubt that Plato spoke of ultimate ontological principles: one of unity, which he identified with the Good, and an opposite principle of indefinite plurality. The basically indisputable testimony of Plato's pupils — Aristotle in particular (*Met.* A 6, for example) — refers expressly to them; there are also numerous indications in Plato's own writings which point in the same direction. The real question is this: what significance does the oral doctrine of first principles have for our understanding of his philosophy as a whole and particularly of the dialogues, which have fortunately all been preserved?

(1) On one side stand the Platonists whom one may call the 'Anti-esoterics', because they dispute the existence of philosophically important oral doctrines outside the dialogues. This view is maintained in an extreme form by the American scholar Harold Cherniss, and in a somewhat milder form for the most part by his numerous followers (e.g. G. Vlastos, R.E. Allen, M. Isnardi Parente, F.N. Tigerstedt).<sup>6</sup> If Plato had an oral doctrine of first principles, say the Anti-esoterics, it consisted merely of tentative experimentation which he did not consider worthy of literary expression. Anyway, they go on, it is difficult if not impossible to gain a clear picture of the theory, since the reports of Plato's pupils are full of

misunderstandings and distortion arising from deliberate systematization.

(2) On the other side, the 'Esoterics' are concentrated at present in Tübingen.<sup>7</sup> We hold the view that Plato intended a systematic synthesis and grounding of his entire thought with this theory of first principles, which is only hinted at in the dialogues.<sup>8</sup> A theory of this kind, with a gradually increasing level of sophistication, seems to us to underlie all the dialogues, from the earliest ones on.<sup>9</sup> As for the evidence of Plato's pupils, we believe that they do provide a reliable basis for the reconstruction of Plato's unwritten doctrine, if subjected to critical appraisal and treated with due caution.

The outcome of the controversy hangs on the way in which the surviving texts – the writings of Plato as well as pupils' reports of the oral doctrines – can most satisfactorily be brought into harmonious alignment. One of these texts is Aristoxenus' description of Plato's lecture. Both the Esoterics and the Anti-esoterics have used it in their argument, but so far it has not been satisfactorily understood by either side – hence Guthrie's understandable resignation in dismissing it as a red herring.

Until now, I should add, the Anti-esoterics seem to have been more justified in their recourse to this passage of Aristoxenus. According to the most probable interpretation of the text, Aristoxenus is describing a public lecture and a unique event (see below). It would seem at first sight, therefore, that the doctrine of first principles was in no way an esoteric, inner-school matter and that the lecture was not a part of Plato's regular teaching activities. I admit for my part that we Esoterics have hitherto been guilty of forcibly interpreting the Aristoxenus passage, in order to square it with Plato's inner-school teaching. It has been pointed out with justification that this text has elicited confused and contradictory statements from us.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps I will be able to repair the damage in this paper.

## 2.

Apart from Aristoxenus, several later authors may be thought to provide additional information about the circumstances of Plato's lecture. It is doubtful, however, whether their testimonies can be referred to the event of Aristoxenus' story.

(1) Simplicius wrote in his commentary *In Aristotelis Physica*, p. 151, 6-11 Diels:

Alexander (of Aphrodisias) says: 'According to Plato, the first principles of everything, including the Forms themselves, are One (τὸ ἓν) and Indefinite Duality (ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς), which he called Large and Small (μέγα καὶ μικρόν), as Aristotle

mentions in his work on the Good.' And one might also learn this from Speusippus and Xenocrates and the others who were present at Plato's lecture on the Good (οἱ παρεγένοντο ἐν τῇ Περὶ τἀγαθοῦ Πλάτωνος ἀκροάσει). For they all wrote down and preserved his teachings, and say that he recognized these first principles.

In another passage of his commentary (p. 453, 25-31) we read:

The first principles of sensible objects as well are One and Indefinite Duality, as Plato is said to have held. He also assigned Indefinite Duality to the intelligible world, calling it Unlimited (ἄπειρον); Large and Small he set up as principles and labelled them Unlimited in his discourse on the Good (ἐν τοῖς Περὶ τἀγαθοῦ λόγοις), at which Aristotle, Heraclides (Ponticus), Hestiaeus and other associates of Plato were present. They wrote down what he said just as enigmatically as he said it (ἀνεγράψαντο τὰ ῥηθέντα αἰνιγματωδῶς, ὡς ἐρρήθη).

Porphyrius, however, with the stated intention of setting these matters out clearly, wrote the following on this subject in his commentary on the Philebus.

Unfortunately it is not clear whence Simplicius derived the statement that various other pupils of Plato apart from Aristotle had produced written summaries of his lecture.<sup>11</sup> But there is nothing to disprove it; moreover, Xenocrates and Heraclides are accredited with works 'On the Good' in ancient bibliographies.<sup>12</sup>

Simplicius (and Porphyrius before him) described the lecture as enigmatic. That need not mean that it had also struck the pupils who recorded it as enigmatic.<sup>13</sup> We may assume that they understood Plato's argumentation without any trouble if he had already discussed the Good in mathematical terms in the Academy.

This brings us to the chief point of uncertainty in both passages of Simplicius. Are Simplicius and his sources referring to the *public* lecture described by Aristoxenus — or do they have in mind an *internal* discourse by Plato intended primarily for his best students? (a) Even if Simplicius *is* referring to the public lecture, it is not certain whether he has correctly interpreted the pupils' 'aide-mémoires' on the Good as stemming from this public lecture. There may have been a misunderstanding here. (b) It is equally possible that Simplicius means Plato's teaching in the Academy, on the assumption that he had lectured once or repeatedly on the Good to a small group of students, who used this material for their own records.

(2) The accounts by Themistius and Proclus are definitely descriptions of Plato's public lecture, but may quite possibly derive solely from Aristoxenus. We read in Themistius (oratio 21, 245 C-D):

It did not in the least prevent wise old Plato from being wise on the occasion of his lecture in the Piraeus<sup>14</sup> when people came flocking from all around and assembled together — not only the townspeople from above but also workers from the fields and vineyards and from the silver-works — and when he presented his treatise on the Good (τοὺς Περὶ τἀγαθοῦ διεξήκει λόγους), that the huge crowd became dazed and streamed away from the place until finally the audience was reduced to Plato's trusted followers only (κατέληξεν εἰς τοὺς συνήθεις ὁμλητὰς τῷ Πλάτῳ μόνους τὸ θέατρον).

Proclus remarks in his commentary on Plato's *Philebus* (p. 688, 4-18 Cousin):

(Interpreters) raise the question whether philosophers should read out their writings before an audience, as Zeno did;<sup>15</sup> and they insist, if one does do so, only to read material suited to the audience so as not to suffer the same fate as Plato when he announced a lecture on the Good (ἀκρόασιν ἐπαγγείλαντα Περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). A great throng of all kinds of people assembled; but when he delivered his lecture, they did not understand his argument, and went away one by one until finally they had almost all gone. But Plato knew that this would happen to him, and had told his followers beforehand not to refuse entry to anyone, since the lecture would still only take place before their group (ἔσεσθαι γὰρ ἐπὶ μόνων τῶν γνωρίμων τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν).

One would like to know whether these two late testimonies provide any further historical information on Plato's lecture. That depends on the difficult source-critical question whether the accounts of Themistius and Proclus derive from Aristoxenus alone, or whether they include an independent tradition. In the former case, everything over and above Aristoxenus' description would be mere imaginative invention. In the latter, we could expect additional information, and Themistius' statement that the lecture took place in the Piraeus, for example, might help us understand the historical circumstances better.<sup>16</sup>

It seems to me that these two late descriptions are secondary insofar as their apologetic bias presupposes an antecedent critical description of the lecture.<sup>17</sup> Themistius and Proclus want to justify Plato's action, by pointing out that he himself anticipated the early, voluntary, departure of unsuitable members of the audience. However, the critical account need not have been that of Aristoxenus, but may have been contained in a work which has not survived to this day. It is not intrinsically impossible, therefore, that this or that detail of the two late descriptions not to be found in Aristoxenus derives from an equally reliable independent source. On the whole though it is more likely that Themistius' and Proclus' accounts are devoid of any new historical information.

(3) Finally, there is an extremely short and therefore unclear passage of the middle-Platonist Albinus (2nd century A.D.).<sup>18</sup> Albinus records Plato's

view that the highest Good is neither easy to find nor plainly communicable to all people (cf. Plato, Tim. 28 C), and he adds: “At any rate, Plato delivered his lecture on the Good only to a few select associates (πάνν γοῦν ὀλίγοις τῶν γνωρίμων καὶ τοῖς γε προκριθεῖσι τῆς περὶ τἀγαθοῦ ἀκροάσεως μετέδωκε).” I see two ways of taking this passage:

(a) In Themistius and Proclus we have encountered a (later) version which tries to reconcile Plato’s public appearance with the restriction of the audience to a handful of pupils. Albinus might therefore represent a somewhat earlier branch of the apologetic tradition than Themistius (4th century A.D.) or Proclus (5th). His would be an extremely condensed version of the story according to which the multitude left early enough to allow Plato to address himself to a small band of associates only.

(b) The other possibility is that Albinus represents a quite different tradition, whereby Plato held a lecture on the Good in the Academy without public admission. In that case, Albinus would show that Plato normally discussed his Agathon-doctrine with his students only, and that the public lecture was an exception to this rule. This second possibility seems simpler and more plausible.

I conclude that only the Aristoxenus passage provides reliable evidence of a public lecture by Plato on the Good. The later accounts are probably derived from Aristoxenus alone (Themistius, Proclus) or possibly refer to Plato’s intramural teaching (Simplicius).<sup>19</sup> Hence I prefer to leave these later authors aside when interpreting Aristoxenus.

### 3.

Let us now take a look at three comic fragments which mention Plato’s Good. It is quite possible that their authors, who were contemporaries or near-contemporaries of Plato, were referring specifically to the lecture on the Good described by Aristoxenus.<sup>20</sup>

(1) In a fragment of Alexis,<sup>21</sup> a Parasite, presumably, or else a hungry guest, says: “(I eat anything everywhere), even if they do not serve it up hot. The good, as Plato says, is good everywhere — if you get me; and what’s pleasant is always pleasant, whether here or there.”

(2) One gathers from a fragment of Amphis,<sup>22</sup> that a slave is discouraging his master from marrying a certain girl: “What good you’ll get from her, master, I know even less than the Good of Plato.”

(3) For Philippides,<sup>23</sup> Plato’s Good is synonymous with the highest human happiness: “I told you, you should remain unmarried and live



happily. The Good of Plato is this, Pheidylus: not to take a wife, and not to risk your luck in still more things.”

These three comic fragments show that the average theatre-goer in Athens had heard of Plato’s Good. It was obviously proverbial for something of universal importance, but difficult to understand.

What is unclear is how Plato’s Good attracted so much attention. There are two possibilities to be considered:

(a) It is conceivable that there was talk of the Platonic Good prior to his public lecture — either as a widespread response to passages in the dialogues, such as the mention of an Idea of the Good in the middle books of the *Republic*, or through information about the inner-school discussions filtering through to the outside world and rousing curiosity.<sup>24</sup>

(b) But it seems to me more probable that the proverbial phrase in the comic fragments is an echo of Plato’s lecture on the Good. If so much had already been said about Plato’s strange idea of ‘Good’ before the lecture, the disappointment of the audience would be less explicable. It is easy to imagine on the other hand how, after the event, people would joke about Plato’s bad lecture all over Athens, and in the theatre.

If the latter interpretation is correct, the lecture must have been a spectacular event leaving a deep impression behind it. The repercussions seem to have lasted a considerable time, since the comedy of Alexis quoted is datable to the period after Plato’s death probably, and that of Philippides certainly.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.

I wish only to deal briefly with the question of the philosophical interpretation of Plato’s doctrine of Good as One. Platonists have long since undertaken the task of collecting the scattered references to Plato’s oral doctrines; they have been able to clarify the philosophical sense of these to a considerable extent, by comparison first and foremost with Plato’s own writings.<sup>26</sup>

The main features of Plato’s doctrine of first principles preserved by the doxographers can be summarized as follows. The goodness (ἀρετή) of a thing is shown by its permanence, beauty, and form. These qualities depend on order (τάξις, κόσμος); that is, on a well-proportioned arrangement of parts within the whole. The basis of order therefore is unity, and thence unity or one-ness is the cause of all good, or good in itself. Since the world is not all order and goodness, one must reckon with an opposite cause: a cause of non-unity, of indefinite plurality, and thence not-good.

Everywhere these two principles can be seen acting in combination, with one or other of them dominant. This can be observed most clearly in the field of mathematics. Arithmetic, geometry, harmonics, astronomy, all incorporate and reveal certain rules which show how unity passes into indefinite plurality, wherever the apparent multiplicity of the natural world may be analyzed into quantifiable shapes, forms and numbers.

Arithmetic and geometry can be used to demonstrate the progression that runs from whole numbers, through various types of incommensurable quantities, to the absolutely irrational; harmonics and astronomy to show that there is mathematical order in the sensible world: in other words, that the pleasant sound of harmony is based on numerical relationships, and that the movements of the heavenly bodies are not random, but follow a logical order. In this way, mathematics became the model-world for Plato which showed in the most accurate and general way that all manifestations of Arete depend on order, and order on unity.

The work of modern scientists and philosophers proves that these ideas of Plato were not an abstruse game, but rather that they remain stimulating and relevant to this day. In 1941, Alfred North Whitehead wrote on the theme "Mathematics and the Good", with express acknowledgement of Plato's lecture on the Good.<sup>27</sup> Whitehead, like Plato, saw good in the predominance of order, form and structure, and bad in the lack thereof: "The infusion of pattern", he writes, "into natural occurrences, and the stability of such patterns and the modification of such patterns, is the necessary condition for the realization of the Good. Mathematics is the most powerful technique for the understanding of pattern and for the analysis of the relationships of patterns. Here we reach the fundamental justification for the topic of Plato's lecture."

## 5.

If the question of the philosophical sense of Plato's lecture on the Good as One has been sufficiently answered, there remains more than ever the question of its historical interpretation: the puzzling thing is why Plato said all this in public. Did he not realize that the lecture was bound to be unintelligible to the greater part of the audience?

The public lecture is even more of a puzzle in the light of repeated statements in his written works to the effect that it is pointless to present a subject as demanding as the doctrine of the Good to an untrained public. In order to formulate this paradox as sharply as possible. I wish to point out with more emphasis than hitherto, that there is a discrepancy between

Aristoxenus' report and Plato's own written views on the conditions for philosophical discourse. As long as this discrepancy lacks a plausible explanation, Aristoxenus' description will remain an unsolved mystery.

Plato wrote frequently and consistently that for the understanding of the highest truths one needs not only special ability, but also long experience and training in dialectic. This condition is easily understandable from the nature of the subject, which involved the apprehension of ultimate ontological principles. The universal validity of these principles for all existing things can only be shown by demonstrating in as many different areas as possible the existence of identical structures and norms, which, by repeated comparison and collation, may ultimately be united in an all-inclusive synthesis.<sup>28</sup>

In the crucial passage of the Seventh Letter (341 A-E) we read that Plato himself never wrote a book<sup>29</sup> on the first principles,<sup>30</sup> and would never do so, and that whoever did understood nothing of the subject. For these things are by no means expressible in the same way as other subjects (ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα),<sup>31</sup> and the apprehension of these things may only be achieved by long familiarity (πολλὴ συνουσία) and an extended period of guided training of the pupil's soul. Therefore it is pointless to publicize these things in writing or by word of mouth (γραφέντα ἢ λεχθέντα), since misunderstanding would be the sole result among unsuitable and unprepared readers or listeners: they would either scornfully dismiss what was incomprehensible to them, or delude themselves into thinking they were the immediate possessors of the highest wisdom.

The reason for esoteric reserve, therefore, lay not in the fact that the theory of first principles was impossible to formulate orally or on paper, but that unprepared persons who were confronted with it would inevitably be confused and misled.

Since the authenticity of the Seventh Letter has been doubted, it is important that the same position can be seen in the incontrovertibly authentic dialogues.

As early as in the Republic (7, 536 B-540 C), Plato describes the long course of education which leads to apprehension of the Idea of Good only after decades of mathematical and dialectical training.

Likewise in the Parmenides (136 E), truth is said to be attainable only after prolonged education in dialectic – and this fact is not known to the Many.

In the final section of the Phaedrus (275 D-277 A), Plato explains at length that the written word is not suitable for conveying ultimate knowl-

edge, since this can only grow and ripen over a period of time.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Plato makes the same point at the end of the *Laws*, his last work. The passage (12, 968 C-E) runs: precise and universal knowledge is only attainable through prolonged communion (πολλή συνουσία) of teacher and pupils. The essential concepts are not ineffable (ἀπόρητα) in the sense of Mysteries, but are indeed 'unsayable in advance' (ἀπρόρητα); that is, not before the student is able to grasp them for himself, after long practice in dialectic.<sup>33</sup>

These passages tell unanimously against a public lecture on the theory of first principles such as actually took place according to Aristoxenus. For Plato's primary objections to publishing it in a literary form certainly applied just as much to a public lecture.<sup>34</sup> How to explain the contradiction?

## 6.

First I will outline the previous attempts at explanation and show how none of them is satisfactory.

(1) It does not help to question the reliability of Aristoxenus. Certainly, one has to reckon in the passage with Aristoxenus' hostility towards Plato and his desire to make the anecdote more pointed.<sup>35</sup> But this malignment is apparent only in the way he *judged* the lecture — as if the speaker had failed by not matching his remarks to the audience. The essence of his account must stand as genuine: namely the fact that Plato gave a lecture on the Good which was a disappointment to most of the audience.

(2) Nor does it help to deny the authenticity of the Seventh Letter (with Cherniss and many other sceptics<sup>36</sup>). The discrepancy which makes the passage of Aristoxenus so puzzling remains. Even if the Letter was written by somebody else, there can be no doubt that this person was so intimately acquainted with Plato and so thoroughly versed in the historical situation, that the *content* may be taken broadly speaking as authentic. Furthermore, even if one ignores the Letter, it is obvious enough from the dialogues that Plato shunned a public exposure of his doctrine of first principles on the grounds that it was too difficult to communicate.

(3) Again, it is impossible in my opinion to relieve the difficulty by assuming that the subject matter of oral dialectic within the school was distinct from the matters treated in the public lecture. The Anti-esoterics tend to argue that the goal of the oral dialectic described in the Seventh Letter and several passages in the dialogues was an intuitive understanding not describable in words,<sup>37</sup> whereas the lecture had a specific subject and

was therefore comparable to the dialogues. Likewise they are wont to emphasize that the lecture on the Good was only tentative in character, subject to repetition and revision afterwards.<sup>38</sup> “Everything goes to show”, however, that the subject was in both cases identical: Plato’s theory of ultimate ontological principles. The Seventh Letter does indeed say that dialectic is supposed to lead to a kind of intuition, but it also assumes that the object of this intuition can easily (or all too easily) be expressed in words; indeed, that the highest truth can be expressed with extreme brevity (344 Ε πάντων ἐν βραχυτάτοις χεῖται). What else can these βραχύτατα be if not One and Indefinite Duality?

(4) On the other hand, all attempts to overcome the paradox by assimilating the lecture on the Good described by Aristoxenus with Plato’s teaching activities within the School have also failed. Even if one assumes that there were occasional summarizing lectures in the Academy apart from the sessions of dialectic, it is difficult to relate Aristoxenus’ story directly to these.

(a) An unbiased reading of the Aristoxenus passage leaves one in no doubt that the lecture was public. Most members of the audience (οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν ἀκουσάντων) were unprepared and taken by surprise – hence they were obviously not regulars of the Academy. Nor were they mere eaves-droppers who had strayed into the Academy by accident (as was the case in the well-known comic fragment of Epicrates<sup>39</sup>); they had assembled in order to listen to a lecture on a specific topic. The time and subject of the lecture seem therefore to have been known in advance in Athens. It had been announced and was *aimed* at the general public, who were positively invited to attend. Moreover, Aristotle and Aristoxenus were only justified in pointing out the failure of the lecture and the perplexity it caused if it had in actual fact been directed at the general public.<sup>40</sup>

(b) There is almost as little reason to doubt that a single occasion is being described by Aristoxenus.<sup>41</sup> The audience could hardly have come and been disappointed more than once. Cherniss was right to protest against an “expansion of the evidence” and to deny that “regular lectures” could be deduced from Aristoxenus.<sup>42</sup> The recent attempts by the Esoterics to use Aristoxenus as a witness to regular lectures on the Good were, I have to admit, mistaken.<sup>43</sup>

(5) The idea that Plato’s lecture was a deliberate ‘Peira’, or test, is also misconceived, in my opinion.<sup>44</sup> Plato had conducted just such an experiment with Dionysius of Syracuse, as we read in the Seventh Letter (340 B-341 B). He explained to Dionysius the full difficulty of the path leading to philosophical wisdom, in the belief that if he was suited to philosophy he

would be spurred on thereby, and if not, turned away.<sup>45</sup>

What Plato said in the Peira was obviously quite different from the content of his lecture on the Good: the former consisted of an advance warning about the long and difficult path ahead; the latter of a summary description of the central doctrine itself.<sup>46</sup> Plato intended and achieved with this Peira just what Aristotle accuses him of failing to do as a lecturer: preparing the pupil for what was to come.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, the lecture contained just what the Peira avoided: the undiluted doctrine itself without any introduction.

(6) Finally, the attempts to explain away the paradox by the personal development of Plato are also unsatisfactory. Our sources do not say when in the course of his lifetime Plato gave the lecture. Two diametrically opposed views are held by commentators:

(a) On the one side (particularly among the Anti-esoterics) the tendency is to regard the lecture as a 'lecture in old age' ('*Altersvorlesung*'); i.e. that shortly before his death, Plato publicized ideas which had not been included in the dialogues and which he had no more time to formulate in a written work. But there is no evidence for the assumption that Plato might have changed his mind about the communicability of the highest philosophical truths towards the end of his life.<sup>48</sup> The final pages of the Laws, which contain what amounts to Plato's last will and testament, and other more general factors refute this view.

(b) The Esoterics are tempted rather by the view that the lecture could have taken place relatively early (say at the inauguration of the Academy in ? 387 B.C.), and that Plato was persuaded by its failure to limit future discussion of the doctrine of first principles to the closed circle of the Academy.<sup>49</sup> For various reasons this solution also seems untenable. The Seventh Letter emphasizes that Plato had always avoided a public airing of these matters. If Aristotle "told time and time again" how Plato fared with this lecture, one might assume that he had been present at the occasion: he entered the Academy in 367 B.C. Plato's earliest dialogues show an extremely well-developed sense of the limits and possibilities of philosophical discourse. Hence it is very unlikely, in my opinion, that Plato ever misjudged the outcome of a public lecture.

## 7.

The question of the dating and biographical context of the lecture is so important that a closer investigation is required. The view that Aristoxenus is describing a lecture in Plato's old age tends to go with the conviction that

the lecture must therefore have been concerned with a late, specific, and peripheral aspect of Platonic philosophy which need not be taken into serious consideration for the interpretation of the dialogues. H.J. Krämer objected, rightly in my opinion, that the difference between the dialogues and the doctrine of first principles, which formed the subject-matter of Plato's lecture, may not be explained as a chronological development but that they must be considered distinct modes of philosophizing: one written, one oral.

But even if one assumes unbroken synchronization of the dialogues with oral discussion of the first principles, one is still left with the problem of the historico-biographical occasion for Plato's unique public lecture; and in this point, there seems to me to be more evidence for a late than for an early dating of the lecture, as proposed by Krämer.

As far as I can see, there is not a single passage in the dialogues which could settle the matter. More precise criteria for the dating question are only to be had from the Seventh Letter. It seems to me that the Letter is ignorant of a public lecture and therefore provides an important index for a late dating.

Unfortunately, the authenticity of the Letter has been questioned, and that by a number of competent Platonists.<sup>50</sup> Many others, myself included, are convinced of its authenticity. For the Letter's relationship to the lecture, I think the question of authenticity is relatively unimportant: even if the Letter is not by Plato's hand, the data pertaining to Plato's situation after Dion's death must be considered true in a historical sense. Moreover, if the Letter *is* ignorant of the lecture, as I believe, it provides internal proof of its own authenticity. This line of argument, not pursued by scholars before now, may be elaborated as follows. The Letter is ignorant of the public lecture. Therefore, in all probability, it was written beforehand, since a later writer would certainly have avoided committing Plato to such a contradiction. So the Letter must have been written in Plato's lifetime, soon after Dion's death (354 B.C. - some six years before Plato died) and before the public lecture. In that case Plato must be the author, because it is as good as certain that no body else would have written the Letter for him as long as he was still alive.<sup>51</sup>

On the question of the Letter's ignorance of the public lecture, 341 DE is the key passage. Plato says: "This much I know, that it (sc. the highest philosophical truth), whether written or spoken, would best be said by myself (βέλτιστ' ἂν λεχθεῖν, potential) . . . But if I believed one ought to write and could tell it to the Many in an adequate fashion, what better thing could I have achieved in my life (ἐπέπρακτ' ἂν, unreal condition) than



to write down that which is of great use to people and to have brought to light the nature of things for the benefit of everybody?"

I think these sentences could not have been formulated as they are if Plato had already made an attempt to publicize the doctrine of first principles. This interpretation does not depend solely on a fallible *argumentum e silentio*, since the mention of a failed attempt would have directly furthered the author's purpose: he could then have supported his main contention — that written and public transmission of the key doctrine is pointless — on the basis of firsthand experience rather than mere inner conviction.

To be in a position to state that public transmission of the doctrine would provoke scorn (καταφρόνησις) or false optimism (ὑψηλὴ καὶ χαύνη ἐλπίς), I do not think Plato needed to have suffered any one particular failure. One should also notice the other passage in the Letter saying how easy it is to appear ridiculous and shamefaced when attempting to give concrete expression to the Forms (343 CD). I think this refers to the debates practised in the Academy in front of other students — and not the situation we find in Aristoxenus.

My conclusion, therefore, is as follows: in all probability the Seventh Letter is unaware of the lecture mentioned by Aristoxenus — which, therefore, must have taken place after the Letter's composition, that is, in the years between 355 B.C. and Plato's death (348/47).

Even if the public lecture was late, as I think, there is no reason to revert to the idea of an 'old man's lecture', with the attendant concept of the first principles being a last dying breath, as it were, of Plato's philosophy. Rather, in what follows, it will be seen that this lecture in old age can only be explained if Plato had for a long time previously held a doctrine of first principles.

The central problem is not solved by a late dating; if anything, it becomes more acute: why did Plato undertake a venture which he had so recently rejected in the Seventh Letter?

## 8.

I have tried to show how previous theories fail to reconcile the gulf between Plato's professed silence on the first principles in his written work and the fact of the public lecture. A better explanation may be sought in Plato's political environment rather than in the man alone. I would guess that the stimulus for Plato's paradoxical public appearance came from the Athenian public to whom the lecture was addressed. I would ask therefore:



was Plato ever faced with a situation in his lifetime in which he might have felt compelled to break his own rule of silence on the first principles? Or more exactly – a situation in which the disadvantages of a public lecture (namely the disappointment and scorn it would cause) were outweighed by the graver consequences of maintaining silence?

I offer the following hypothesis as a possible answer. There seem to have been two external factors which moved Plato to publicize his esoteric doctrine of first principles in the final years of his life.

(1) For many years Plato had avoided airing his doctrine outside the company of his closest pupils. But whiffs of the doctrine still reached the public and excited considerable interest. When Dionysius of Syracuse, and others who had heard something of the doctrine, wrote on the subject, Plato realized that continued secrecy was pointless and even disadvantageous because the public was being informed about his doctrine from unauthorized and incompetent sources. I believe he decided as a result of this to give the public a genuine version of the doctrine. The intention was to invalidate the spurious accounts of others and combat their circulation.

(2) Plato's esoteric reserve could easily have been construed as artificial secrecy, and have irritated influential members of the Athenian public. The exclusiveness of the Academy rankled particularly when one heard that the protected doctrines concerned knowledge of the Good and the key to happiness. The suspicion might also have arisen that the esoteric dogma of the Academy was kept secret because here was a chance for the well-known anti-democratic ideas of Plato to be sharpened to a dangerous degree. Plato for his part probably realized the danger of this public antipathy to his school. As a result, he reluctantly decided after all to publicize his doctrine of first principles in the form of a single lecture so as to remove the odium of secrecy. He hoped in this way to deflate the criticisms and suspicions which had arisen through his exclusion of the public. And in so doing he accepted the reverse side of the coin, that many people, through not understanding the lecture, would react with scorn and derision.

How far can this hypothesis be substantiated and verified? First, an objection must be met. It is true that Aristoxenus does not mention any political or other positive motivation behind the lecture. This can easily be explained, however, with reference to Aristoxenus' and Aristotle's shared motive in telling the story and their wish to streamline the anecdote: they both intend a comparison between their own superior teaching-method and Plato's ineffective approach. Hence they only mention the effect of the lecture on new and unsuspecting listeners, not on those already acquainted

with the difficulty of the Agathon-doctrine. Hence also, Aristotle and Aristoxenus ignore Plato's real purpose which would have explained why he neither was able, nor wished, to facilitate matters for the audience.

I wish now to present the evidence which I think supports my case. The Seventh Letter is an important item; I know its authenticity is doubted and that my new argument (above) will not convince everybody. Therefore it is only *one* item in the list. More important than the authenticity of the Letter for my purposes is Plato's political situation which *is* no doubt reliably represented in the Letter. My thesis is therefore not dependent on the Letter's authenticity, nor, I hope, will it be unacceptable to those who consider the Letter pseudo-Platonic.

(1) Regarding the publication of the doctrine by incompetent persons, we know from the Seventh Letter (341 B) that Dionysius of Syracuse as well as others had composed works on the subject.<sup>52</sup> Even if these did not bear Plato's name, they were bound to be connected by the public with Plato's esoteric doctrine. Hence in the Letter Plato forcefully disowns these illegitimate and misguided treatises, it being impossible to give an adequate account of the doctrine by these means (341 C-E). Plato states: "I know this much, that it (sc. the doctrine of first principles) would best be said by myself either in writing or orally and that, if badly written, would be painful not least to myself" (341 D). From this statement to a public lecture is not too big a step, I think. Plato remained true to his rule of oral communication despite his decision about the lecture. He never took the further step to a written treatise on the doctrine (which is also ruled out for the future in the Seventh Letter 341 C: οὐδὲ μήποτε γένηται).

Dionysius' work might have been still more embarrassing for Plato in reinforcing the impression that Plato's doctrine was anti-democratic. Even someone who had not read the work might jump to the conclusion that the Syracusan tyrant favoured a doctrine teaching that Good is One since that served his autocratic regime.

In the Seventh Letter (341 E), a public presentation of the doctrine of first principles is said to be bound to provoke a false reaction, whether scorn (καταφρόνησις) or false optimism (ἐλπίς). By countering pretentious and erroneous accounts with his own lecture, Plato could not help causing public disappointment and scorn, but could avoid the worse misunderstanding, namely the false impression that ultimate truth is something easy to grasp.

(2) For the second line of argument, we need evidence that Plato had public opinion against him in precisely this matter of the esoteric exclusiveness of the Academy. For most of his lifetime Plato seems to have

avoided a head-on confrontation with the ruling powers in Athens.<sup>53</sup> But there are indications of conflicts and estrangements, especially in his last years.

(a) The Seventh Letter consists basically of an *apologia* for the events leading to the troubles in Syracuse. Plato obviously wanted to persuade the Athenians by means of the letter that his friend Dion had intended to introduce a legal and liberal system in Syracuse, and that his own connections with Syracuse had nothing to do with self-interest or lust for power. The Letter as a whole, therefore, shows that Plato had acquired the unfortunate reputation of instigator of the Syracusan revolution as a result of the affair.

Plato carefully states his reasons for withholding the doctrine from the public. As he had often said before: it is pointless publicizing such matters since they can only be understood after years of familiarity (342 A-344 D). This justification permits one the further conclusion that Plato had been criticized for the secrecy surrounding his teaching.

But the Letter would hardly have convinced outsiders on this point. The existence of written works by Dionysius and others, mentioned by Plato in the Letter, would have indicated rather that Plato *could* have made everything public had he so wished. Plato says in the Letter that there *was* a secret doctrine which he was reluctant to publicize – an admission which if anything would have increased people's curiosity. Altogether then, the impression would have been reinforced that Plato deliberately denied others the knowledge shared between himself and a select few of Good and human happiness. In this situation I would guess that Plato decided to put an end to the criticism by means of a public lecture.

(b) Equally instructive in this context is the fact that Plato received frequent unflattering attention in contemporary comedy. Seventeen passages have been preserved in which Plato and his school are the target.<sup>54</sup> Aristophon wrote an entire comedy entitled "Plato".<sup>55</sup> Plato probably sensed danger in these attacks. In the *Apology* he attributes a substantial measure of the guilt for the prosecution and conviction of Socrates to Aristophanes' *Clouds*.<sup>56</sup>

The secret goings-on in the Academy seem to have been a favorite butt in stage-comedy.<sup>57</sup> A fragment of Alexis (fr. 180) runs: "To talk nonsense with Plato in private (κατὰ μόνας)".<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere Plato's solemn, not exactly friendly, demeanour is mentioned (Amphis fr. 13). And we hear that members of the Academy were considered arrogant (Ephippus fr. 14; Antiphanes fr. 33).<sup>59</sup>

(c) The possibility of taking objection to the elitist atmosphere sur-

rounding the Academy is clearly shown in the Antidosis speech of Isocrates (or. 15). The orator compares his school with that of Plato (§ 84f.): the Academy claims to possess a Good and a Philosophy unknown to anyone else; I, on the other hand, teach what is generally recognized; the Academy takes in a handful of individuals into its community, whilst I wish to show the path of happiness to the entire Polis. The speech was probably published in 353 or 352; at exactly the time, in my opinion, that Plato was making up his mind to publicize the doctrine of the Good.

(d) Plato was undoubtedly thought 'undemocratic' in Athens. By birth he belonged to the aristocracy of the city. And it was perfectly obvious from the dialogues that he had the gravest reservations about democratic politics. As it happens, we know from a remark in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that Plato was not afraid to attack an influential Athenian politician for a contemporary cause.<sup>60</sup> The secrecy surrounding the Agathon-doctrine might likewise have been taken as a facet of his anti-democratic leanings.<sup>61</sup>

Regardless of the question of the authenticity of the Seventh Letter, it is clear that the unfortunate outcome of Dion's enterprise in Syracuse brought a bad name to the Academy in Athens as well.<sup>62</sup> People must have thought that the school produced "supporters of tyranny and trouble-makers".<sup>63</sup> Likewise the connection could be made between the Academy and the Macedonian dynasty, and perhaps even the expansionist policies of Philip, which were an increasing danger to Athens.<sup>64</sup> Some Athenians surely began to suspect that these closely-guarded doctrines of Plato were directed against the democracy. If the Good in the Academy was supposed to be an omnipotent unity as one heard, then this could be taken as a programme for monarchical, anti-democratic, policies of more than chance interest to the Syracusan tyrant.<sup>65</sup>

Now such political suspicions could not be totally allayed by publicizing the doctrine of first principles. However, there are various ways of dispelling suspicion and logical refutation is only one. It is my opinion that Plato gave a valid summary of his doctrine in the lecture, but in a highly technical, paradoxical form (αἰνιγματωδῶς). If the people of Athens took his ideas for incomprehensible mumbo-jumbo, they would at least cease to regard him as a threat and to prosecute followers of such an abstruse creed. So he achieved both objectives: protection of his school and preservation of his secret for those who were able to understand it.

(e) If Plato sensed public opinion against himself and the Academy, he had to take this seriously; for he was well aware of disturbing past cases of philosophers being persecuted.

In Athens<sup>66</sup> there had of course been the conviction of Socrates on

charges of ἀσέβεια and corruption of the Youth. Anaxagoras and Protagoras, according to one story, had also been charged with Asebeia. An important sector of the Athenian public obviously reacted with extreme touchiness to innovations in the sphere of religion.<sup>67</sup> Certainly, there was respect for the silence surrounding such venerable institutions as the Eleusinian Mysteries. But where this prerogative of certain cults was apparently being usurped for political ends, public reaction was correspondingly fiercer (one is reminded, for example, of the political charges raised against Alcibiades for desecrating the Mysteries: Thuc. VI 28; 61, 1).

Most serious from Plato's point of view was the memory of the persecution of Pythagoreans in Southern Italy, since his own doctrine of first principles was unmistakably related to the Pythagorean tradition. In 490 B.C. the meeting-house of the Pythagoreans in Croton had been set on fire, killing many. This was followed by repeated incidents of persecution and banishment.<sup>68</sup> According to Iamblichus' description (*de vita Pythag.* 248-264), the main reason for public antipathy was the exclusiveness of Pythagorean society: the excluded became antagonists.<sup>69</sup> Plato may have feared that his own school, which in so many respects resembled that of the Pythagoreans, might meet a similar end to theirs, caused likewise by angering the public with the elitist secrecy of their proceedings.

(f) Various events which followed after Plato's death show that such fears were not completely unfounded. Shortly before or after Plato's death, Aristotle left Athens for reasons which we must assume were political: his good relations with Philip of Macedon made it too dangerous for him in Athens.<sup>70</sup> At all events, there is reliable evidence that Aristotle fled from Athens towards the end of his life (in the year 323), when anti-Macedonian feeling posed a threat to his personal safety.<sup>71</sup> A temporary expulsion of philosophers from Athens followed the downfall of Demetrius of Phaleron in 306 B.C. On that occasion there was discussion in the Assembly about introducing the death-penalty for philosophers who founded a school without the approval of the Council and Assembly.<sup>72</sup>

If one takes these various pointers together,<sup>73</sup> one can easily imagine, in my opinion, how Plato decided to clear himself of charges of undemocratic secrecy by inviting the Athenian populace to an open lecture on the relevant topics. A large number of people might lose interest in his philosophy for the future, but that was still preferable to their hostility towards the school.

Historical and personal experience goes to show that the public always reacts with wariness if not outright animosity to secret societies, and that the best defence against such hostility is to satisfy the curiosity of the opponents.<sup>74</sup>

In conclusion I would first reiterate one methodological premise: namely that my suggestion must remain hypothetical, since the evidence as it stands does not amount to a formal proof. On the other hand, it seems to me the only hypothesis at present which offers a plausible solution to the riddle inherent in Aristoxenus. In other words, the only one which offers a coherent explanation of the existing evidence. For this reason I maintain that one will have to use my solution as a working hypothesis until another even simpler solution is found which helps us further towards a full understanding of the facts.

The results and consequences of my investigation are as follows:

(1) On the basis of the hypothesis I suggest, neither the evidence for Plato's public lecture nor Plato's own written remarks stating his intention not to discuss the doctrine of first principles in public need be played down or circumvented.

(2) According to my view, the lecture on the Good was not a typical event for Plato, but rather an exceptional and unique affair. Plato had three usual teaching methods: (a) The literary dialogues introduced the reader to philosophy by showing him aspects of philosophical question and answer. (b) External ('exoteric') school exercises for a wider circle of pupils, as shown for instance by the comic fragment of Epicrates,<sup>75</sup> taught the use of certain methods (especially the *dihaeresis*-method) for particular types of subject.<sup>76</sup> (c) The non-public dialectical discussions for an inner circle of pupils were supposed, over an extended period, to lead to a general view of truth which encompassed all individual aspects in a theory of first principles.

The lecture on the Good was exceptional, because here Plato addressed his doctrine of first principles to the public, whereas otherwise he kept it for discussion within the inner circle of his associates. The exception is no longer inexplicable: Plato, as I have tried to show, intended thereby to invalidate spurious written versions of the doctrine and to counter the criticisms incurred by the usually closed-shop activities in the Academy.

(3) As we saw above, it is questionable whether Simplicius means, or is right in saying, that Plato's pupils recorded the contents of the single public lecture. What surely is right is that after Plato had broken his own vow of public silence, his students must have felt more tempted and more justified to make their own *written* record of the doctrine.

This doctrine had been common knowledge inside the school before the public lecture; summaries of the doctrine were probably not unusual,

interspersed among sessions of dialectic in the school.<sup>77</sup> Therefore it is wrong to say simply that the public lecture on the Good became the main source for further dissemination of Plato's unwritten doctrines. If the pupils were reproducing the contents of this single lecture, they could also have been drawing on similar summaries given by Plato within the school. Other parts of pupils' testimonials to Plato's oral doctrines are certainly derived from his intra-mural lessons (e.g. Aristotle's description of Plato's ideal numbers and the school discussion thereof).

(4) It would be a serious misunderstanding of my position if the reader takes a late dating of the lecture to mean that the *philosophical content* of the lecture was a late development. On the contrary, my interpretation depends on the existence of the key doctrine within the school long prior to the public lecture, which was precipitated by external factors. I think it was precisely the difficulties involved in guarding the doctrine from the public which finally forced Plato out into the open. Hence, the interaction between dialogues and oral philosophy which began no later, and probably earlier, than the Republic is corroborated by my interpretation, not called into question.

(5) As a consequence of the interpretation proposed here, I believe that it is entirely relevant and permissible to describe Plato's doctrine of first principles as esoteric.<sup>78</sup> Of course, the word esoteric is ambiguous and distasteful; it is all too easily connected with the idea of artificial secrecy, obscurantism and elitist arrogance. Such a misconception of esoteric in the Platonic sense, is, as we have seen, not limited to modern times, but existed in Plato's own day. It was to avoid and overcome the appearance of wilful elitism, in my opinion, that Plato decided on a public lecture. By esoteric Plato did not mean hidden or mystical; he wished rather to make allowances for the conditions necessary for the transmission and reception of highly specialized philosophical ideas.<sup>79</sup>

(6) That the masses did not understand Plato's lecture was also proof of his contention in the Phaedrus and the Seventh Letter (repeated, presumably after the lecture, at Laws 12, 968 DE) that esotericism in these matters was justified. The rejection by modern-day Anti-esoteric Platonists of the indirect evidence for Plato's oral doctrine reminds me in a certain way of the audience's disappointed dismissal of Plato's enigmatic lecture. The philosophical sense of the Platonic doctrine of first principles was, and is, not to be grasped from a brief summary (even briefer for us owing to the fragmentary state of the evidence).<sup>80</sup>

(7) If I am right, the content of the public lecture must have corresponded to the inner-school doctrine of first principles, though not with its



didactic method. The correspondence seems to me guaranteed by the fact that Plato could only achieve his political goal if he genuinely presented those doctrines in his lecture which had previously been discussed exclusively in the closed circle of his pupils. It is inconceivable that Plato and his pupils deliberately tricked the public in this respect.

Thus the lecture on the Good contradicts the usual view of the Anti-esoterics, that if there were certain unwritten doctrines behind the literary dialogues, then these were not fully developed theories, but only tentative and provisional experiments not yet ripe for publication. Certainly there had been such in the Academy. But the core of Plato's oral doctrine consisted of a coherent and mature theory of first principles — otherwise it could not have been presented as a whole in the form of a lecture. The fact that they were not treated in the dialogues must therefore be explained by the hermeneutic reasons given by Plato himself in the *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter*.

(8) If my interpretation of Plato's lecture on the Good is historically and biographically correct, the lecture itself disposes of an argument consistently raised against the position of the Esoterics.<sup>81</sup> The argument goes: the Esoterics' position is discredited by the *Seventh Letter*, which they are so fond of quoting. For this says: anyone who writes on the theory of first principles understands nothing about it. And when the *Seventh Letter* says that highest knowledge is acquired by intuitive inspiration and may not be spoken about like other matters (ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα 341 C), then this means, they say, that it cannot be expressed in words at all. This argument may now be countered not only by the *Seventh Letter* itself, but also with reference to the lecture on the Good: for Plato, the doctrine of first principles was not 'inexpressible', but could perfectly well be formulated and presented as a theory. The difficulty which Plato had in mind lay in the fact that the theory could not be satisfactorily conveyed by a short, dogmatic, summary, since it needed years of mental preparation. Modern Platonists who try to give a doxographical account of his doctrine of first principles therefore only transgress Plato's convictions if they give the impression, and themselves believe, that philosophical insight can be given or gained in this way.

Plato's first principles, as he himself often said, can only be understood in depth via the long course of oral dialectic. All the same, the pupils' accounts of the lecture on the Good give us an idea of what was aimed at in the dialectic practised in the Academy. And I am convinced that with this idea we are in a better position to understand Plato's dialogues, that is, to understand the author's ultimate intention. For the pupils' reports show



that the references in the dialogues to concepts which are difficult to communicate are not aimed at thin air, but at the School's doctrine of first principles.

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## NOTES

I am grateful to the British Council and the Universities of London, Cambridge, Leeds and Manchester for the opportunity of presenting this paper in seminar form during a visit to England in October 1978. Participants in the discussion at these Universities sharpened my understanding of the main issues involved; likewise Jonathan Barnes in Oxford offered a number of stimulating comments. The initial stimulus for the interpretation presented here came from a discussion with Ingeborg Schudoma in Tübingen. Subsequently I have discussed the paper with H. J. Krämer and other Tübingen colleagues. I was unable to persuade them that my new theory furthered our common cause, but their criticisms at least helped me to anticipate the possibility of misunderstandings arising from my paper and to try and avoid these by expressing myself more clearly.

W. D. Furley (Cambridge/Tübingen) managed the translation from German into English with great understanding.

<sup>1</sup> A bibliography of the more recent contributions to this subject may be found at the end of this paper. — The present contribution is intended primarily to compete with Harold Cherniss' influential book "The Riddle of the Early Academy" (1945), whose first section is entitled "Plato's Lectures: A Hypothesis for an Enigma". Cherniss' hypothesis — that all the evidence for Plato's doctrine of Forms and first principles apart from the dialogues themselves should not be ascribed to Plato — seems to me not to have explained the phenomenon of the lecture on the Good, but to have made it still more of a philosophical and historical puzzle.

<sup>2</sup> The conjecture (τὰ γὰρ ὁν) (Macran and others) is unnecessary. — τὸ πέρας is the subject of the sentence according to C. J. de Vogel, M. Isnardi Parente, W. K. C. Guthrie (1978, 424): "that Limit is the Good, a Unity". I take τὸ πέρας adverbially with H. Cherniss (1945, 87 n. 2), W.D. Ross, I. Düring, H. J. Krämer, E. N. Tigerstedt, in accordance with a common Greek usage, and as the context requires. Aristoxenus wishes to underline the paradox that Plato could have described something as abstract as 'One' as 'Good'.

<sup>3</sup> ἀπεγίνωσκεν ἄν with some Mss., and the editions of Macran and da Rios. The others have ἐπεγίνωσκεν ἄν.

<sup>4</sup> εἰλημμένη Marquard (Westphal, da Rios) instead of the Mss.' εἰρημένη.

<sup>5</sup> References to Aristotle's Περὶ τὰ γὰρ ὁν are collected in W. D. Ross, *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta* (Oxford 1955), 111-120. In this work, Aristotle obviously combined a record and a critique of Plato's theory. Cf. J. Brunschwig, "EE I 8, 1218 a 15-32 et le περὶ τὰ γὰρ ὁν" in: *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik*, Berlin 1971 (Peripatoti 1), 197-222. One sentence of criticism has been preserved (p. 113 Ross, fr. 27 Rose), aimed at the excessively high expectations of Platonic theory: "One must remain conscious of being human, not only in happiness, but also in argumentation." — Philip of Opus gives us another glimpse of Plato's lecture on Good as One: *Epinomis* 991 D-992 A (introduced by ἀνάγκη τὸ γε τοσούτον φράζειν . . .).

<sup>6</sup> Guthrie takes a middle line. He believes the esoteric doctrine of first principles is reliably attested, but that this 'indirect evidence' is useless for our understanding of Plato's philosophy: "... (it) will only sow confusion and blur the vivid impression left by the dialogues" (1978, 418).

<sup>7</sup> See the works of H. J. Krämer, K. Gaiser, H. Happ and J. Wipern in the bibliography. Recently, the same position has been adopted by Th. A. Szlezák ("Dialogform und Esoterik. Zur Deutung des platonischen Dialogs Phaidros", *Mus. Helv.* 35, 1978, 18-32; "Probleme der Platoninterpretation", *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 230, 1978, 1-37). J. N. Findlay (1974, esp. pp. 23, 59, 466) differs in seeing Plato's entire oral philosophy as a series of provisional experiments. In his opinion, the lecture reported by Aristoxenus was also only an introduction to possible lines of further research. — A detailed discussion by H. J. Krämer of new works relating to this whole complex is shortly to appear in *Philosophische Rundschau*.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of 'system' proves time and time again to be misleading, because systematic thinking is equated with rigid dogmatism (E. N. Tigerstedt 1977, 89-91) — as if there was no such thing as an open or dialectical system.

<sup>9</sup> Because important developments took place at the oral level, the dialogues need not necessarily reflect the immediate state of Plato's developing thought. On the other hand, there are good reasons for supposing that in the last twenty years or so of Plato's life, the fundamentals of his philosophy remained substantially unchanged; see H. J. Krämer 1968, 123f.

<sup>10</sup> Justified criticism of my former interpretation of the Aristoxenus passage has been made by E. N. Tigerstedt 1977, 70-73; 136-138.

<sup>11</sup> The line of transmission from Aristotle's critical record via Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. 200 A.D.) to Simplicius (6th century A.D.) is clear from both passages of the last author. Porphyrius (3rd century A.D.) appears only to have known a considerably abbreviated version of one of the records; his intermediate source is difficult to identify (Derkylides?).

<sup>12</sup> For Xenocrates: *Diog. Laert.* 4, 13; for Heraclides: *id.* 5, 87.

<sup>13</sup> See also E. N. Tigerstedt 1977, 138f. (n. 87).

<sup>14</sup> He uses the words χορός and θέατρον in his account; these could, but need not necessarily, refer to the theatre in the Piraeus.

<sup>15</sup> According to Plato's description, *Parm.* 127 C.

<sup>16</sup> Only Ph. Merlan (1968, 706), to date, considers the possibility that Themistius and Proclus are drawing on a source independent of Aristoxenus.

<sup>17</sup> The derivative character of Themistius' and Proclus' apologetic accounts is seen above all in their failure to give a clear picture of Plato's intention: *why* did he invite the multitudes to his lecture if he foresaw their disappointment?

<sup>18</sup> Albinus, *Didascalicus* 27, 1, p. 129 Louis.

<sup>19</sup> Albinus' reference is ambivalent. — Themistius and Proclus may have been trying to reconcile Aristoxenus' story with the tradition of Plato's esoteric school treatment of the Agathon-doctrine.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. J. de Vries 1964, 708f.

<sup>21</sup> Alexis fr. 152 (II 353 Kock): κἂν μὴ παραθῶσι θερμά, τάγαθὸν Πλάτων / ἀπανταχοῦ φησ' ἀγαθὸν εἶναι, μανθάνεις; / τὸ δ' ἡδὺ πάντως ἡδὺ κἀκεῖ κἀνθάδε.

<sup>22</sup> Amphis fr. 6 (II 237 Kock): τὸ δ' ἀγαθὸν ὅτι πότερ' ἐστίν, οὐ σὺ τυγχάνειν / μέλλεις διὰ ταύτην, ἥττον οἶδα τοῦτ' ἐγώ, / ὧ δέσποτ', ἥ τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν.

<sup>23</sup> Philippides fr. 6 (II 303 Kock): ἔλεγον ἐγὼ σοι μὴ γαμεῖν, ζῆν δ' ἡδέως. / τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθὸν δ' ἐστὶ τοῦτο, Φειδύλε. / μὴ λαμβάνειν γυναῖκα, μηδὲ τῇ τύχῃ / διὰ πλείονων αὐτὸν παραβάλλειν πραγμάτων. Philippides is perhaps referring to Plato's definition of the Good as One: to stay single is best.

<sup>24</sup> We are poorly informed regarding the distribution and effect of Plato's dialogues during his lifetime. All the same, Aristotle (ap. Themistius or. 23, 295 c-d) said that the *Gorgias* and *Republic* were read outside Athens even.

<sup>25</sup> Alexis was twenty-five years old at the most when Plato died; by far the greater part of his long career took place after this event. Philippides was even younger. The date of Amphis' comedy remains uncertain.

<sup>26</sup> The equation of Good with One and its mathematical foundation is not explicit in the dialogues. Nevertheless it in no way contradicts the contents of these, and is the objective consequence of many passages in Plato's writings. Recently this has been shown from the point of view of dialectic by H. G. Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*, Heidelberg 1978 (Sitzungsber. d. Heidelb. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl. 1978, 3). — A summary of the 'unwritten doctrine' may also be found now in Guthrie (1978, 426-442).

<sup>27</sup> In Germany, the philosopher and physicist C.F. von Weizsäcker has recently treated Plato's doctrine of first principles in: *Die Einheit der Natur*, München 1971, 113-115; 446-491; *Der Garten des Menschlichen*, München 1977, 337-339.

<sup>28</sup> The pseudo-Platonic 2nd Letter (341A-B) also talks of the long course of dialectic which only arrives at its goal after many years. Another reference to the same thing can be seen in a comparison made by one of Plato's pupils to "frozen words" which only melt and become audible after a long time (Plut. mor. 79A).

<sup>29</sup> Plato uses the word σύγγραμμα here (Epist. 7, 341C) as in the *Phaedrus*, where he refuses to give a written account of the highest knowledge. The Anti-esoterics consistently argue that the word refers only to a systematic textbook, not to the literary dialogues (so also Guthrie 1978, 411). But there are contextual objections to this qualification (since Plato is speaking generally here of the risk of causing confusion involved in the public presentation of specialized doctrines among untrained readers or listeners), and linguistic considerations (cf. Th. A. Szlezák, *Mus. Helv.* 35, 1978, 25f.).

<sup>30</sup> The doctrine of first principles is clearly intended by *περὶ ὧν ἐγὼ σπουδάζω* (341C), as the synonymous expression *τὰ περὶ φύσεως ἄκρα καὶ πρῶτα* (344D) proves.

<sup>31</sup> This sentence (341 C) does *not* mean: "They are in no way expressible, as other subjects are". The negative (οὐδαμῶς) does not refer to the possibility of their being said at all (ῥητόν), but to the *way* they may be uttered compared with other things (ὡς ἄλλα μαθηματα). Thus amongst others, E. Schmalzriedt, *Platon. Der Schriftsteller und die Wahrheit*, München 1969, 16. Moreover, the negated ῥητόν means *may* as well as *can* not be said, in the sense of not being permissible (cf. ῥητά in *Laws* 7, 817 D). Plato is exploiting the concept of ἀπόρητον in the Mystery Religions, signifying that which may not be uttered (but all too easily can). He avoids the word ἀπόρητον itself (cf. *Laws* 12, 968 E) because in his case, the censure has nothing to do with mysticism, but is based rather on the conditions necessary for the digestion of philosophical truths. The whole line of argumentation in the passage shows not that ultimate knowledge is impossible to say, but that it cannot be dealt with on a par with other doctrines without grave danger of sowing confusion — and therefore should not. This qualitative distinction means that other doctrines may be presented and transmitted through the medium of language

without further ado, whereas a corresponding presentation of the first principles would only be meaningful to someone who had been trained in the art of dialectic.

<sup>32</sup> The possibility of the much discussed *τιμώτερον* (Phaedrus 278 D) referring to a doctrine beyond the dialogues has recently been demonstrated by Th. A. Szlezák with new argumentation: *Mus. Helv.* 35, 1978, 18-32.

<sup>33</sup> As in the Seventh Letter, Plato assumes here that the highest knowledge can be expressed in a certain way, but that it *should* not, for reasons not of artificial or religious secrecy, but objective necessity.

<sup>34</sup> E. N. Tigerstedt rightly remarks, (1977, 73f.): “Plato’s rejection of writing (in the Seventh Letter) applies also to lectures, such as that on the Good.”

<sup>35</sup> On the malicious tendency of Aristoxenus (cf. fr. 43, 61-68, 131 Wehrli) see the recent remarks of A. S. Riginos 1976, 199; E. N. Tigerstedt 1977, 71. Aristoxenus does not say directly that Plato’s lecture was a failure, but insinuates as much by omitting Plato’s motives and expectations for the lecture (see below).

<sup>36</sup> On the debate about the authenticity of the Seventh Letter see below, Section 7.

<sup>37</sup> On the problem of the communicability of Plato’s Agathon-doctrine, see above n. 31.

<sup>38</sup> This line is taken in an unconvincing piece by K. H. Ilting 1968, where he assumes that the lecture and the dialogues represented the same level of thought, and that the lecture remained a fragment of a system, overtaken eventually by the development of Plato’s own thought. — G. Watson (1973, 2-5, 12f., 43, 113, 128, 132) emphasizes the point that the lecture on the Good had a tentative character, in order to avoid a devaluation of the dialogues relative to the doctrine of first principles. — Julia Annas (*Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Books M and N, Oxford 1976,<sup>62</sup> also takes Plato’s lecture on the Good as an insignificant offshoot in his main development: “The paucity of our evidence for it would be explained by Plato’s probable revulsion, during the period of the later dialogues, from the kind of bold speculation apparent in both it and the ‘Republic’”. — If this were so, it is hard to understand why the lecture was of such central importance to Plato’s pupils.

<sup>39</sup> More on the situation described in the fragment of Epicrates below, Section 9, § 2.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle’s and Aristoxenus’ comparison of their own lectures with Plato’s seems to me inconclusive for the question of its public delivery and length. Nor, incidentally, is it impossible that Aristotle gave occasional lectures to the general public.

<sup>41</sup> Most scholars have decided that the lecture was a unique affair for reasons which I now think valid. See esp. G. J. de Vries 1968; Ph. Merlan 1968; W. Theiler, “Diotima neuplatonisch”, *Archiv f. Gesch. d. Philos.* 50 (1968), 29-47 (esp. p. 29); E. N. Tigerstedt 1977, 71f. Undecided: J. Wipperfurth 1972, XIII; uninterested: G. Watson 1973, 39.

<sup>42</sup> H. Cherniss 1945, esp. p. 2 (against Field, Burnet, Taylor, Robin).

<sup>43</sup> This correction applies only to our view of the lecture reported by Aristoxenus. Whether there were classes on the doctrine of first principles inside the school is a question which must be answered independently. Arguments for the repetition of the lecture described by Aristoxenus may be found in H. J. Krämer 1966 and 1968, 113f. At first Krämer believed that textual considerations in Aristoxenus proved the lecture took place on several occasions. G. J. de Vries 1968 and Ph. Merlan 1968 raised objections showing that the question cannot be decided on textual (linguistic) grounds. Aristoxenus’ description remains ambiguous in this respect. In his subsequent treatment, Krämer tried above all to deflate the argument that the audience could only have been surprised and disappointed once. But this argument remains cogent if the lecture was addressed to a large public audience.

<sup>44</sup> This is the opinion of H. Gundert 1968, 89f.: "... die abschreckende Wirkung, über die Aristoxenos sich mokiert, würde gerade dem entsprechen, was eine *πείρα* beabsichtigt." Even less convincing is H. Dörrie's view (1969, 3f.) that Plato had dressed up his central doctrine so thoroughly that the untrained person could never have understood it, and then, in the lecture reported by Aristoxenus, had "die Probe gemacht, ob dieser Schutz wirksam war."

<sup>45</sup> W. Burkert (Weisheit und Wissenschaft, Nürnberg 1962, 17 = Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism, Cambridge/Mass. 1972, 18) is right to repudiate the view of the lecture as an experiment; see also E. N. Tigerstedt 1977, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Concerning the *πείρα* with Dionysius, Plato says in the Seventh Letter (341 AB) that he had not taught the whole of his philosophy, and had omitted the most important part. The lecture on the other hand, with its equation of Good and One, led straight to the heart of the doctrine of first principles.

<sup>47</sup> According to the Seventh Letter (341A), the *πείρα* was intended to protect the teacher from the pupil's criticisms on the basis that the latter had only himself to blame after such a warning.

<sup>48</sup> O. Wichmann 1966, 647f. suggests that Plato gave his lecture on the Good prompted by approaching death: "... (um) zu der ganzen, ungeheuer umfassenden Frage, die sein Leben bedeutet hatte, schliesslich doch noch eine Antwort wenigstens so zu geben, wie sie ihm möglich war."

<sup>49</sup> H. J. Krämer 1968, 112f. inclines towards a relatively early dating before the Republic: "Eine relativ frühe Datierung der Vorlesung wird auch durch die Art nahegelegt, wie Platon in der 'Politeia' (506 D 8, 509 C 1) das *ἀγαθόν* behandelt und die mit Erfahrungen des 7. Briefes übereinzustimmen scheint." It is conceivable that Plato's comments in the Republic (also 7, 517 D, 518 AB, 536 B) to the effect that any presentation of the Agathon-doctrine would provoke ridicule, reflect Plato's personal experience of the disappointment caused to both sides by such a lecture. However, passages of this kind seem to me rather to show that Plato's multifarious experiences had persuaded him early on of the pointlessness of public presentation.

<sup>50</sup> Here are just a few, more recent, contributions to the controversy: (a) *Against* authenticity: L. Edelstein, Plato's Seventh Letter, Leiden 1966; G. Müller, Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen 221, 1969, 187-211; M. Levison, A. Q. Morton, A. D. Winspear, "The Seventh Letter of Plato", Mind 77, 1968, 309-325; S. Michaelson, A. Q. Morton, "The authorship and integrity of the Platonic Epistles", Revue Internationale de Philosophie 103, 1973, 3-9; N. Gulley, "The authenticity of the Platonic Epistles", in: Pseudepigrapha, Entretiens Hardt 18, Vandoeuvres-Genève 1972, 105-130 (Discussion: 131-143); E. G. Caskey, "Again — Plato's Seventh Letter", Class. Philol. 69, 1974, 220-227. (b) *For* authenticity: K. v. Fritz, "Die philosophische Stelle im siebten platonischen Brief und die Frage der 'esoterischen' Philosophie Platons", Phronesis 11, 1966, 117-153; L. Brandwood, "Plato's Seventh Letter", Organisation internationale pour l'étude des langues anciennes par ordinateur: Revue 1969, 4, 1-25; F. Solmsen, Review of L. Edelstein, Plato's Seventh Letter (1966), Gnomon 41, 1969, 29-34; W. K. C. Guthrie 1978, 402.

<sup>51</sup> J. B. Skemp nevertheless considers this remote possibility in: Plato, Oxford 1976 (Greece and Rome, New Surveys in the Classics, 10), 10f.

<sup>52</sup> Reports of pupils such as Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates, cannot be intended here: in the Letter they are described as *χωριώτεροι κριταί* (345 B).

<sup>53</sup> C. B. Armstrong 1953, 102: "... largely because of the skill with which he avoided collision with the dominant democrats of fourth-century Athens, suspicions in his day never burst into open hostility."

<sup>54</sup> Bibliography in K. Gaiser, "Ein Komödienwitz über Platon", *Musa Iocosa*, Festschrift A. Thierfelder (Hildesheim 1974), 62-67.

<sup>55</sup> We possess only a brief quotation from this comedy (Aristophanes fr. 8, II 279 Kock): a dig at the ascetic life of philosophers.

<sup>56</sup> Even in the *Laws* (II. 934 E – 936 B), Plato condemns all forms of calumny in the theatre.

<sup>57</sup> This was clearly a well-worn theme in comedy. Aristophanes (*Clouds* 140, 143, 254-262) makes Socrates a teacher of secret knowledge available only to privileged pupils. But the reproach – which obviously had an effect on the public – applies much better to Plato than Socrates.

<sup>58</sup> Compare the N.T. formulation: Mk 4, 10-12: κατὰ μόνους against τοῖς ἑξω. It is highly doubtful whether the comedy of Alexis fr. 180 was written before Plato's lecture (cf. n. 25 above).

<sup>59</sup> The anecdotes handed down also abundantly show that haughtiness (τύφος) was thought to be a characteristic of Plato: Diog. Laert. 6, 26 (with parallels); 4, 7; 3, 39. – Arrogance seems also to have been the undoing of Dion of Syracuse (Pseudo-Platonic *Epist.* 4, 321 B, Plut. *Vita Dionis* 8; 52).

<sup>60</sup> Aristotle, *Rhet.* I 15, 1376 a 7-11. The sentence Aristotle quotes belongs to Plato the philosopher rather than Plato the comic poet as has been assumed in the past. Cf. K. Gaiser, "Plato comicus or Plato philosophus?" *B.I.C.S.* (London) 1979.

<sup>61</sup> As early as the *Gorgias* (485 DE) it is clear that the privacy of Socrates' philosophical conversations with his pupils (and Plato's even more so) must have been a source of annoyance to Athenian politicians.

<sup>62</sup> Callippus, the Athenian who had been responsible for Dion's murder, afterwards addressed an official communiqué to the city of Athens (Plut. *Dion* 58, 1). He had fought side by side with Dion, and was also known in Athens to have been attached to Plato's school. In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato washes his hands of Callippus and the deed which brought Athens into disrepute (333 D – 334 C; 351 DE).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Athenaeus 9, 508 D: τυραννικοὶ καὶ διάβολοι.

<sup>64</sup> In fact, Philip's relations with the Academy seem to have been mixed: good with Aristotle, but somewhat strained with Plato and others (cf. Diog. Laert. 3, 40). Plato's pupil Euphraeus of Oreus, who (according to the *Fifth Letter*) had great influence over Perdiccas III, the brother and predecessor of Philip, became a confirmed opponent of Philip (Demosth. 9, 59-62).

<sup>65</sup> A different political suspicion hung over Plato's closely-guarded Agathon-doctrine in Syracuse: there, one feared that Plato wished to remove Dionysius from power for the benefit of Dion, by inducing him ἐν Ἀκαδημείᾳ τὸ σωπώμενον ἀγαθὸν ζητεῖν καὶ διὰ γεωμετρίας εὐδαίμονα γενέσθαι (Plut. *Dion* 14, 2).

<sup>66</sup> Demetrius of Phaleron could claim in his "Apology of Socrates" (fr. 91-93 Wehrli) that the Athenians had never got on well with any philosopher.

<sup>67</sup> Plato was certainly above suspicion regarding Asebeia or atheism, as it was obvious from his written works how concerned he was about piety. However, some Athenians may have doubted whether the same gods were worshipped in the Academy as in the



City; and the old prejudice about scientific explanations — that they are opposed to religion (cf. Laws 12, 966 E — 967 E) — may not have been so easy to overcome.

<sup>68</sup> In the mid-fifth century there were further actions against the Pythagoreans in Southern Italy. In Plato's time, the Pythagorean Order had accepted a restricted form of democracy, which brought them into conflict with the tyranny of Dionysius I of Syracuse.

<sup>69</sup> Their chief opponent, Cylon of Kroton, was apparently refused admission to the society (Iamblichus, *de vit. Pyth.* 248). Animosity generally arose through people's resentment (φθόνος 254) at being refused admission (252), and at the exclusiveness of Pythagorean society (ἰδιαισμός 255, 257). Iamblichus was presumably drawing on fourth-century sources.

<sup>70</sup> Vita Aristotelis syriaca II § 9 in I. Düring 1957, 188: "Being frightened by the execution of Socrates, he retired from Athens and stayed near the Hellespontus". It is well known that Aristotle's father had served as physician to King Amyntas III, Philip's father. Cf. I. Düring 1968, 176f.: "Der Hauptgrund . . . für seine Abreise war jedenfalls die politische Situation in Athen, die sein Leben gefährdete."

<sup>71</sup> Cf. I. Düring 1968, 180; the most important first-hand evidence is fr. 10 and 11 of Aristotle's letters in: M. Plezia, *Aristotelis privatorum scriptorum fragmenta* (Leipzig 1977).

<sup>72</sup> Demochares spoke for the motion in his speech entitled κατὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων (Aristocles of Messene in Euseb. *praep. ev.* 15, 2, 6; Athenaeus 13, 610 e-f; Diog. Laert. 5, 38).

<sup>73</sup> There are several other minor pieces of evidence: (a) Plato often mentions political threats to the philosopher (Prot. 316 C — 317 C; Rep. 6, 496 C-E; 7, 517 A-D; Epist. 7, 331 D). (b) There is little or no certainty in the stories which describe moments in Plato's life when he had reason to fear sharing the fate of Socrates; such peril was supposed to be the reason why he fled to Megara (Diog. Laert. 2, 106), why his defence of Chabrias was a brave deed (Diog. Laert. 3, 23f.), and why he kept his doctrine secret (Numenius fr. 23 des Places, and various Christian authors). (c) Apuleius (Apologia 27) seems to have heard of suspicion attached to the Platonic Agathon-doctrine, since he comments that Plato's Agathon was as uncanny to the ordinary person as certain religious creeds (e.g. of Pythagoras, Empedocles).

<sup>74</sup> The early Christian apologists seem to have been influenced partly by this design. J. Barnes draws my attention (in a letter) to the following example: "In 1649, when the Levellers and Diggers were being attacked, Gerrard Winstanley wrote a pamphlet entitled 'The True Leveller's Standard Advanced, or the State of Community opened and presented to the Sons of Men' — a piece designed to show how decent and innocuous the Diggers really were." See G. H. Sabine (ed.), *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (Ithaca, New York, London 1941). Likewise the Freemasons have sometimes publicized their secrets to allay public suspicion. For example, a book by an anonymous hand in the last century was entitled: "Die Freimaurer und ihre Stellung zur Gegenwart. Offne Enthüllung der Geschichte und Zwecke des Freimaurerordens, nebst einer Abwehr der jüngsten Angriffe des Adv. E. E. Eckert zu Dresden", Leipzig 1852. J. van Ess ("Neuere arabisch-sprachige Literatur über die Drusen", in: *Die Welt des Islams*, N. S. 12, 1969, 111-125) has examined esotericism among the Druse people, and on page 120 reports on an author who broke his sect's rule of silence, giving as reason his view that evil was being said of the Druses because their tenets were not widely known. In University life, we have experience of protests occasioned by private conferences which ceased immediately when these were opened to the public (and found to be boring).

<sup>75</sup> Epicrates fr. 11 (II 287f. Kock). He describes the scene in the Academy of Plato's pupils, in the presence of curious visitors, engaged together in the analytic definition of a pumpkin. This obviously refers to a preparatory seminar-class, whose form and content should be clearly distinguished from the comprehensive theory of first principles, and from the unique public lecture.

<sup>76</sup> Exercises in definition (διαίρεσις) in the Academy are denoted by Aristotle as ἐξω-  
τερικοὶ λόγοι (see below, n. 78).

<sup>77</sup> Even if Plato had not given a synopsis of this sort in the school before, one cannot doubt that the doctrine already had systematic characteristics. School dialectic sought connections to and from the first principles in the most diverse areas; this took place within a systematic structure of which pupils were conscious even without an express synopsis.

<sup>78</sup> The word ἐσωτερικός appears only in late Greek as the opposite of ἐξωτερικός. However, Aristotle's common expression ἐξωτερικοὶ λόγοι probably comes from the Academy. He does not call the literary dialogues exoteric (as many commentators assume), but rather the exercises for a wider circle of pupils mentioned above. Cf. K. Gaiser, article on "exoterisch/esoterisch"; in: Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie 2 (Basel 1972), 865-867. The word ἐξωτερικός may originally have derived from the meeting-place: Aelian 3, 19 mentions an ἔξω περίπατος in the Academy outside Plato's private property.

<sup>79</sup> F. Schleiermacher, G. W. F. Hegel, and more recent Anti-esoterics were therefore quite right to object to the idea of Plato artificially keeping an important theory secret, and to explain that the difference between exoteric and esoteric was less a question of the author's manner of presentation than of the relative depth of understanding of the reader. But they were wrong to reject the possibility of a more general and comprehensive unwritten doctrine beyond the dialogues for this reason. The truth is that, in the field of oral dialectic as well as in the dialogues, everything could be both formulated and expressed, the difference between esoteric and exoteric depending chiefly on the receptiveness of the pupil. Plato decided in this situation that he, as a responsible author, should in practice avoid the presentation of specialized doctrines to everyone indiscriminately — so as to avoid misunderstanding — until finally this policy brought him up against public opposition.

<sup>80</sup> There is also the other possibility of course — that one decides (like Aristotle) after prolonged study that Plato's doctrine of first principles is a philosophical illusion, on the grounds that any attempt at systematizing reality is misconceived.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. H. Cherniss 1945, 13.

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